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Letter dated 12 February 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to convey to you information regarding the interreligious and intercultural cooperation and dialogue in the Republic of Uzbekistan (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 44.

(*Signed*) Alisher **Vohidov**
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Annex to the letter dated 12 February 2007 from the Permanent Representative of Uzbekistan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Information on measures taken in Uzbekistan to strengthen interfaith cooperation and religious tolerance in society

Since independence, a process of regeneration of the spiritual foundations of society has been under way in Uzbekistan. Religion is regarded as a factor in the formation of people's spiritual outlook, based on the principles of morality and upholding the nation's rich spiritual and moral heritage.

In 1991, the Freedom of Conscience and Religion Act was adopted in Uzbekistan. It reflects the new attitude of the State towards religions and believers. Its main provisions demonstrate clearly the respectful attitude in Uzbek society towards the creeds, traditions and culture of the country's multi-ethnic and multi-faith population.

All national legislation is based on the eradication of religious exclusivity and discrimination on religious grounds and is consistent with the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments.

Article 61 of the Uzbek Constitution enshrines "equality among religions and guarantees non-interference in the activities of religious communities". In addition, the Government takes a sincere interest in the humanitarian and outreach activities of religious organizations and is creating the conditions necessary for the spiritual and moral development of their members.

The establishment of a new model of relations between religions and the State, the guarantee of religious freedom in society and the recognition of the right of various faiths to exist are producing positive results. There is no religious conflict and an atmosphere of inter-ethnic and religious tolerance prevails in Uzbekistan.

Currently, 2,222 religious organizations and 16 denominations are active in Uzbekistan. Among the organizations, 2,042 (92 per cent) are Muslim, as 88 per cent of the country's population consider themselves to be followers of Islam.

In addition, Uzbekistan has 164 Christian organizations, eight Jewish communities, six Baha'i communities, one Hare Krishna society and one Buddhist temple.

All manifestations of religious extremism are alien to the people of Uzbekistan, who have come out strongly against any destabilizing activities which threaten the democratic foundations of the independent State of Uzbekistan.

A Council on Faith Matters has been established under the Committee for Religious Affairs to promote interaction among religious organizations, to assist them in carrying out their activities and to develop joint measures to strengthen interfaith and inter-ethnic peace and harmony. Its membership consists of the leaders of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, the Tashkent and Central Asian diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Union of

Evangelical Baptist Christian Churches, the Full Gospel Christian Church Centre, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Jewish religious community of Tashkent.

Hundreds of churches, synagogues and houses of prayer were built or restored in the years following independence. They include Orthodox churches in Tashkent, Samarkand and Navoi, a Catholic church in Tashkent, an Armenian Apostolic church in Samarkand, a Buddhist temple in Tashkent and many others. New religious organizations continue to be established and registered.

The religious organizations of Uzbekistan freely celebrate all religious holidays. Thus, with every year, more and more Muslims celebrate Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, Christians Easter and Christmas, and Jews Passover, Purim and Hanukkah. By presidential decrees, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha have been declared holidays.

Particular attention is being given to the regular holding of various religious outreach events to further strengthen interfaith interaction.

In 1995 a Christian-Muslim conference entitled "Living together under one heaven" was held in Tashkent. Representatives of the World Council of Churches and several foreign churches took part in the forum.

In 1996 two significant dates were commemorated:

- In November: the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Diocesan Administration of the Russian Orthodox Church. For the first time in the entire history of the Patriarchate, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Aleksei II, came to Central Asia to celebrate the occasion;
- In December: the Evangelical Lutheran community of Uzbekistan celebrated the centenary of the only Lutheran Church in Central Asia.

In 2002 the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the centenary of the revival of Catholicism in Central Asia.

Celebrations were held in Samarkand in October 2003 to mark the centenary of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Preparations are under way to celebrate the one hundred and thirty-fifth anniversary of the Tashkent and Central Asian diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church. Representatives of various faiths are taking part in the preparations.

In the years since independence, several international symposiums have been held to mark the following significant dates and anniversaries associated with world-renowned Islamic scholars and theologians:

- In September 1993: the six hundred and seventy-fifth anniversary of the birth of Bahauddin Naqshband;
- In November 1995: the nine hundred and twentieth anniversary of the birth of Mahmud al-Zamakhshari and the eight hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of Najmuddin Kubra;
- In October 1998: the one thousand two hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the birth of Imam al-Bukhari;

- In November 2000: the one thousand one hundred and thirtieth anniversary of the birth of Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and the nine hundred and tenth anniversary of the birth of Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani;
- In November 2003: the nine hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abdulkholiq al-Gijduvoni;
- In December 2004: the six hundredth anniversary of the birth of Khodja Ahrar Wali.

It is worth noting that representatives of various faiths take part in events organized by religious organizations.

In the years following independence, the Koran, Hadith selections from the al-Bukhari collection, the Bible, 16 books of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament, a history of the apostles and other religious literature were translated into Uzbek for the first time.

In late 2004 the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, in conjunction with the Uzbek Society for the Blind, published the Holy Koran in Braille. Uzbekistan became the third State in the world to carry out such a noble deed. There are some 24,000 blind persons currently living in Uzbekistan. Specialized boarding schools and public libraries and all persons so desiring will be provided with copies of the Koran in Braille.

As elsewhere in the world, Uzbekistan is careful to protect its historical monuments, irrespective of their religious associations. In addition to their historical value, they are also of cultural, architectural, artistic and practical value. Many historical monuments in Uzbekistan are recognized as world heritage sites and are under the protection of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a subsidiary body of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, has declared Tashkent the world capital of Islamic culture for 2007, in recognition of Uzbekistan's outstanding contribution to Islamic culture and science, its preservation of monuments and its continued enrichment of Islamic heritage.